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THE "Metropolitan Interments Bill" appears to us, after due consideration, a most able piece of legislation, and should have the earnest support of all who

feel the enormity, the indecency, and the danger of the present system of depositing the dead in the midst of the living,—evils not possible but certain, not confined to a few but extending to all. It is quite true that certain parts of the bill do not go far enough for some, but then these same parts go much too far for others: it is likewise thought by some that private interests are more considered than they ought to be, but then, on the other hand, a large and powerful body are of opinion that these interests are not sufficiently protected by the Bill; and if those who are honestly labouring to get rid of intramural interments and provide means for "burying our dead out of our sight," will take this clashing of interests into consideration, they will see that the Government measure is framed so as to have the best chance of passing into an Act, and that it should have their earnest support. If those who really seek the prevention of intramural burial quibble over clauses and stickle for the "bit more," they will find plenty who are interested in maintaining the present system to aid them in their obstructive course, and the Bill will be thrown out. Instead of getting more they will get nothing. This was so fully seen by the "National Society for the Abolition of Burials in Towns," that at a numerously attended meeting held last week at the house of Mr. Mackinnon, M.P., after a very full examination of the Bill, they abandoned a list of objections which had been drawn out, and passed unanimously a vote of thanks to the Government for bringing in the Bill.

Much of the individual opposition which has been shown to the Bill has been caused by the misrepresentation of interested parties, that its provisions are what those who have examined the Bill know they are not.

Clause 7, for example, which provides that the Board of Health may, if they see fit, purchase and take by agreement or otherwise all or any of the cemeteries mentioned in the schedule, stipulates that it must be *subject to the rights to graves, vaults, and monuments subsisting therein*.

By clause 12, the Queen in Council may, upon report of the Board only (*but is not forced to do so*), order discontinuance of interment in churchyards, &c.

By clause 13 the inhabitants of parishes comprised in the district or part in which interment is ordered to be discontinued are to have *right of sepulture in burial grounds provided under this Act*.

And then as to the assertion that the Government have taken forcibly into their own hands the conduct of all funerals, let the public read the clause (26), and judge for themselves. It runs as follows:—"And be it enacted, that the said board shall make provision for the management and conduct, by persons appointed by them, of the funerals of persons whose bodies are to be interred in the

burial grounds provided under this Act, *where the persons having the care and direction of such funerals desire to have the same so conducted*; and the said board shall fix and publish a scale of the sums to be payable for such funerals, inclusive of all matters and services necessary for the same,—such sums to be proportioned to the description of the funeral, or the nature of the matters and services to be furnished and rendered, but so that *in respect of the lowest of such sums the funerals may be conducted with decency and solemnity*; and the persons having the care and direction of the funeral of any person whose body is to be interred in any such burial ground, *where they are desirous of having the same conducted by the same board*, upon furnishing to the said board or their officers a note in writing, stating the scale according to which *they are desirous* the funeral should be furnished, and upon payment for such funeral according to such scale, *shall be entitled to have such funeral conducted by the said board accordingly*."

Parties may still employ their own undertakers if they will. But even if we admit that the management of all funerals will fall into the hands of Government—that they will monopolize the trade—we must remember it is a *monopoly by which the public themselves are to benefit*: no revenue is to be derived from it: the accounts will be audited, be open to public inspection, and be brought annually before Parliament.

In the report from the Board of Health, dated February, 1850, on which the present Bill is based, the evidence of some of the leading undertakers is given, who themselves show the extent to which the public are plundered in the time of sorrow and distress. Circumstances have led to the allowance of a certain scale of charges,—charges admitting of such enormous profits (with a sufficiency of business to keep the staff occupied), that they have brought an army of intermediate men into the field, who trade with the capital of others.

Mr. Sadler, a large undertaker, says "there are, perhaps, 3,000 men calling themselves undertakers, and who trade with the capital of about ten houses,"—these are upholsterers, parish clerks, tailors, &c. Surgeons and solicitors are tempted, by heavy commission, to recommend, and the servants expect to participate in the good thing. "I have myself," says the witness, "found three servants standing in my way on my leaving a house, and I have had to direct them to open the door before they would let me out!"

The result of this enormous competition is that, sometimes for weeks, respectable undertakers have not a funeral, the staff and the capital lie idle, and high charges must be made for the business when it does come, to cover the loss. The cost to the public can be lessened only by concentrating the business.

An objection has been made by some who are anxious to get rid of intramural burials, and are otherwise favourable to the Bill, to the clause (29) which provides for the compensation of the clergy. It directs the board to ascertain the yearly average during the last five years of the sums received by the incumbent in respect of interments, and then to pay to the incumbent for the time being a perpetual annuity of such amount as may appear to the board to be a just compensation, "having regard to the duties, and payment (if any) in respect of duties, from which the incumbent is relieved by the discontinuance of interment."

By clause 31 power is given to the board,

with the approbation of the Bishop of London, upon any vacancy in an incumbency, to reduce the amount of the annuity, "In case it appear to them, having regard to the duties of such incumbent, and the value of the living independently of any annuity under this Act, just and expedient so to do."

The clergy must be paid; and it would be manifestly unjust to take away one means of doing this without providing another.

No time should be lost in providing places of sepulture away from town, and closing the present overfilled graveyards of the metropolis,—the fever-stills of this mighty centre of active life. Summer is approaching, and there is too much reason to fear that with it will again come the mysterious destroyer which last year carried off, in the metropolis alone, no fewer than 16,000 persons. The deleterious effect of graveyards on the atmosphere, and the connection between a tainted atmosphere and the cholera, cannot now want proving. In a little pamphlet published by the medical practitioners residing in the western district of Paddington, who have been collecting evidence to obtain the closure of St. George's burial-ground, in the Uxbridge-road, one simple fact is stated, which of itself speaks trumpet-tongued. In the houses immediately abutting upon the burial ground in question, **MEAT CANNOT BE KEPT TWENTY-FOUR HOURS**. This is not the assertion of one individual, but is repeated by the inhabitants one after the other,—"*meat cannot be kept fit for human sustenance twenty-four hours*." What must be the state of the atmosphere which human lungs are forced to inspire, whether fit or not?

Cemeteries must be formed, not merely for London, but for all the principal towns throughout the kingdom, and architects will be called upon to give them, by means of their art, that appearance of permanence, repose, careful attention, and solemnity, which they should present. The impressions which these give are most powerful, and should not be disregarded.

We will close our article with the following pertinent remarks by Dr. Sutherland, in the report to which we have already alluded:—

"The time has surely come when all trafficking in the spoils of poor humanity should cease, and when the whole process of interment should be undertaken as a solemn and pious duty, which society owes equally to the remains of all her members, however exalted or however humble."

In executing this trust it should never be forgotten that the very fact of death exerts an influence either for good or evil on the community at large. All the rites of sepulture among ancient nations clearly point to the recognition of this influence. The tombs erected in the great ages of antiquity were as remarkable as their temples; and while we wonder at the matchless sculptures which decorated their religious edifices, we should not forget that admirable works are also to be found on the funeral urns and monumental structures of the same era.

The deepest emotions of the human soul have a tendency to find a voice through the beauties of art, and it is perhaps not too much to affirm that the latter owes as large a debt to those sympathies which encircle the ashes of departed friends as to the exercise of the religious sentiments. In modern times the same desire to connect the beauties of nature and art with the rites of the tomb has shown itself wherever the barbarous practices of the dark ages have given way before enlightened improvement. Some of the extramural cemeteries of the continent are decorated with fine specimens of sculpture and fresco painting, while architecture has also lent her majestic proportions for the same object in the grand